

Empire and Exploitation: The Neo-Assyrian Empire

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INTRODUCTION

The Neo-Assyrian (hereafter NA) empire is the name given to a polity centred on the upper Tigris river which at its height in the seventh century BC controlled territory extending from the Zagros mountains in the east to the Levant (Syria-Palestine) and much of Egypt in the west; from the Persian Gulf in the south to the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates in south-eastern Anatolia in the north. It was the largest polity seen in Western Asia up until that time. The NA period is technically a linguistic designation, denoting the third and last period of the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian (the Old Assyrian period c. 2000-c. 1800; the Middle Assyrian period c. 1400-c. 1050), although this period is coincident with the empire in which the texts were generated. While dates for the beginning of the empire can be disputed, it is generally accepted that the empire existed from the late-tenth century until the late-seventh century (c. 934-c. 605), some three hundred years. It was therefore also the most durable empire seen until then in Western Asia. There had been a smaller Assyrian empire for part of the Middle Assyrian (hereafter MA) period which extended across north-eastern Mesopotamia (now northern Iraq, north-eastern Syria and south-eastern Turkey) and after which the NA empire was initially fashioned. Previous to this the empires based in Mesopotamia were centred in the south (Babylonia) and, while extending along the Euphrates river valley into northern Syria, were much more modest in their territorial reach. The best known of the southern-based empires are those founded by Sargon of Akkad (c. 2340-c. 2159; Liverani 1993; discussed by Mann 1986: 130-178) and Hammurabi of Babylon (he of the famous 'law code'; 1863-1712 [middle chronology]). Arguably these third and early-second millennium 'empires' were rather different in their forms of maintenance and political integration than what one sees in the NA empire.

With this empire lasting some three hundred years, it is possible to identify changes in its character; not simply regarding its geographic extent, but also in its organization and modes of political domination and economic exploitation. The present

paper offers a description of aspects of these changes by means of an historical overview of the period. In so doing it attempts to elucidate, with varying degrees of success, a number of questions suggested by Jack Goldstone that should prove useful for the comparative study of empires: How did the empire begin? How was it maintained and expanded? How did it end? How was it ruled? Given the nature of the available sources it is possible to offer an extended consideration of two areas closely related to the second and fourth questions, namely, the principles or beliefs that provided legitimacy and identity to both rulers and the ruled; and the mechanisms of imperial control, including the classification of regions of the empire into different categories. The NA empire is significant not only for the new and distinctive ways in which it justified and attempted to integrate the empire. It also bequeathed modes of imperial organization and legitimation to the ensuing Neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. Before turning to the historical outline of the NA empire, however, the paper briefly sets out by way of orientation the sources available for the study of the empire and the types of questions they can address, and it briefly address certain aspects of NA culture and society.

ORIENTATION/BACKGROUND

Some brief comments on the sources available for the study of the NA empire:

1. Written Sources (a representative rather than exhaustive list of examples in each category)
 - a) Chronological texts: kinglists, chronicles, eponym lists (year names taken from the names of officials) (Grayson 1975; Millard 1994).
 - b) Royal inscriptions: annals, display inscriptions, votive inscriptions, “letters to the god” (reports on military campaigns) (Luckenbill 1926-27; Grayson 1972-75; Grayson 1975; Grayson 1980). As these texts are primarily royal commemorative texts they have proven to be excellent sources for the study of royal ideology and the ideological justifications for Assyrian imperialism. They also include important information concerning the political geography of the empire, types and amount of tribute and booty obtained, chronology of reigns, political history.
Texts a) and b) cover the whole period, but not in uniform depth. More b) texts, for example, were produced in periods of Assyrian ascendancy — periods 1a), 1b), 2a), 2b) below.
 - c) Officials’ inscriptions: included here are inscriptions (i) written by NA governors in their provinces (see Frame 1995:11) and (ii) written by indigenous ruling houses that were retained in power by the Assyrians, as evidenced in Neo-Hittite and Aramean and Phoenician texts from Syria-Palestine (Gibson 1975, 1982). As the Tell Fekherye inscription (mid-northern Mesopotamia) shows, types (i) and (ii) were not mutually exclusive categories since local rulers could represent themselves as governors as well as indigenous monarchs (in this bilingual stele the local ruler is termed

- “governor” in the Akkadian text and “king” in the Aramaic text); (iii) royal inscriptions written by independent Babylonian kings (Frame 1995)
- d) Loyalty oaths and treaties: These are the oaths sworn by vassals and also by Assyrian officials (Watanabe 1987; Parpola and Watanabe 1988; Brinkman 1995). Probably to be included here are the Aramaic treaties from Sifre (Fitzmyer 1995) which are thought by some to be between an Assyrian provincial governor and a client king.
 - e) Legal, economic, and administrative documents: The administrative texts deal with the palace and temple, provincial and military administration. Administration often includes economic matters (Menzel 1981; Fales and Postgate 1992, 1995). Legal texts deal with decisions before a judge over matters such as murder, theft and debt (Jas 1996), or concern conveyances (of persons or property, including land), contracts (loans and promissory notes), and receipts (as proof that a debt had been discharged) (Postgate 1976; Kwasman 1988; Kwasman and Parpola 1991). There are also legal and economic texts from Babylonia (Brinkman and Kennedy 1983). Also to be included here are royal grants and decrees giving land and tax concessions to senior administrators (Postgate 1969).
 - f) Letters: about 2,300 letters and fragments (about 1,000 lines of text) mainly from period 2 (see below), although 90% of all datable letters come from two brief periods in period 2b) - “ten years at the end of Sargon’s reign and nine years at the beginning and end of Esarhaddon’s and Assurbanipal’s reigns, respectively” (Parpola 1981:120). The letters are written to and from the royal court, dealing with administrative matters (only in part to do with the provinces), and about half of them deal with matters of medicine, extispicy, astrology and omen interpretation (Parpola 1970-83; Parpola and Lanfranchi 1987-90; Hunger 1992; Parpola 1993; Cole and Machinist 1998).
 - g) Extispicy and oracular material: these are largely generated for the royal court by cultic experts in response to enquiries to deities, particularly Shamash the god of justice (Starr 1990). Whereas in the letters to the king (category f) above) it is commonly unsolicited omens being reported, the extispicy reports are all solicited by the king to obtain divine advice. A related category of texts are “prophecies” delivered to the king from the goddess Istar (the god of war [and love], so often the message is an encouragement for the battle) (Parpola 1997; Nissinen 1998). The date of all these texts is quite late (period 2b), but they offer insight into the types of political decisions that needed to be made by kings, the ways in which they were reached, and other concerns the kings had (illness, loyalty of officials/clients). Together with the annals (category b above) they also help to track military campaigns, since the kings always sought divine support and the divine timetable in undertaking military activities.
 - h) Miscellaneous: largely literary texts, some of which give insight into royal ideology (Livingstone 1989). One Babylonian literary text is significant since it advises the king on the proper rule of Babylonian cities (Foster 1993, vol 2: 760-62).
2. Non-Written
- a) Surface surveys – undertaken for sections of the upper Euphrates valley and northern Jezirah (both north central Mesopotamia), but otherwise generally underdone (Kühne 1991; Kühne 1995; Wilkinson 1995; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995).

- b) Excavations — mainly cities, notably the Assyrian royal (capital) cities in the homeland (such as Kalhu [Nimrud]; Dur-Sharrukin [Khorsabad]; Nineveh; Ashur) as well as some provincial capitals (for example, Til Barsip/Kar Shalmaneser [Tell Ahmar] on the Euphrates' bend). Emphasis has been on palatial buildings, which has led to the discovery of texts but leaves us with little understanding of urban sites as a whole.
- c) Art – extensive analysis of the Assyrian palace reliefs, particularly with an eye to their ideological import. There is also interest in influence on Assyrian art from western (that is, Aramean and Neo-Hittite) artistic traditions (Reade 1979; Winter 1997; Russell 1991; Cifarelli 1998).

The preponderance of written sources is from the later period (period 2b). We rarely obtain anything from the subjugated peoples themselves (beyond official texts of the type 1b), so our view of them is from the perspective of the dominant Assyrian power. The biblical texts from Israel and Judah ascribed to this period are about our only source for the views of subjugated peoples. Texts such as First Isaiah (Isaiah 1-39), Amos, and Deuteronomy evidence knowledge of Assyrian literary traditions (Weinfeld 1972; Machinist 1983; Paul 1991; Steyermanns 1995). Much of the Assyrian source material, both written and archaeological, is skewed towards the royal court and the king in particular. The types of sources, their provenances and dates circumscribe to a great degree the analysis of the empire that is possible.

Both Assyriology and the historical study of ancient Western Asia based on the cuneiform sources (as distinct from classical or biblical sources) are still relatively young, only about 150 years old. Much of that time has been spent deciphering the texts, establishing a reliable chronology, and outlining the political history. For the NA period, deciphering the texts has proven to be particularly demanding, with a number of false steps along the way. Take the letters mentioned above (type 1f). They were rather poorly copied in the 1890s through 1910s and similarly poorly edited in the 1930s; they thus proved to be of limited historical use. It was not until the 1970s that reliable translations of them began to appear, thanks primarily to the work of Simo Parpola. Similarly, hand copies of the economic and administrative texts had been published (Johns 1898-1923), but they were not always accurate and often proved hard to understand, not the least because it proved difficult to establish a context for them and they are filled with specialist terminology. Nicholas Postgate's work since the late 1960s has helped immensely to clarify the meaning of these texts. Having said that, it must be admitted that there is much which we cannot deduce simply because we have no clear knowledge of the context of the texts. Parpola's team producing the State Archives of Assyria (Parpola 1987-) (that is, the complete corpus of NA texts produced by the empire) has rendered an invaluable service to those who do not want to be burdened with the decipherment of the texts. That does not mean, of course, that a first-hand familiarity with the texts and an intimate knowledge of the language do not remain desiderata for historians of the NA empire.

The upshot of the above is that a number of questions pertinent to those interested in the comparative study of empires cannot be readily answered with any assurance. Take

demography, for example. Ancient Near Eastern historians have been reticent to offer even guesses at the population of Western Asia for any pre-Hellenistic period. It might be possible to estimate the population by extrapolating from the number of deportees given in NA annals, if we knew what percentage of the conquered population they represented, and if we could trust the numbers given. The overall number of people deported in the NA period ranges from 1.5-4.5 million (Oded 1979: 19-22). But even the lower of these figures is commonly considered to be impossibly high, not the least because of the logistical problems facing the Assyrian administration in moving, in the largest contingent, some 208,000 persons (from Babylonia to Assyria). Even if this latter figure is interpreted as the number of persons deported in a series of movements, logistical problems remain. While the figures cannot be trusted to extrapolate an accurate population count, the general settlement pattern clearly underwent a change with more villages appearing across northern Mesopotamia (Kühne 1995; Wilkinson 1995), and signs of increased settlement in Babylonia (Adams 1981; Brinkman 1984). Urbanism, not the least in the Assyrian heartland, is also a feature with royal cities either being newly built or being refurbished and expanded. Provincial capitals were also constructed or refurbished with their populations increased by new settlers. According to Oates (1968), on the basis of site-size the newly constructed royal city of Kalhu (Calah; modern Nimrud) would have had a population of 63,000, and the refurbished Nineveh 120,000. The populations of these royal cities were mostly settled by the crown, and arguably the same obtains for most, if not all, the new agricultural settlements across northern Mesopotamia. Rather than reflecting population increase, changing settlement patterns were an outcome of a government policy that included the resettlement of people after deportation and the sedentarizing of semi-nomadic Arameans and Chaldeans. It points to a restructuring of the agricultural economy; exploiting labour in new ways, and opening up new lands.

We are only a little better served in respect of technology. Assyria lagged behind both the Hittites and Syria-Palestine in the use of iron. The Hittites had mastered the methods of producing significant amounts of iron by at least the 13th century, and Syria-Palestine was making wide use of the technology by the 10th century (see Waldbaum 1978; Wertimé and Muhly 1980). Assyria at the beginning of the 9th century was still largely dependent on bronze for weapons and for agricultural and household implements. Iron was seemingly appropriated by Assyrians for military use from caches captured in Syria-Palestine, but by the third quarter of the 8th century was undoubtedly a producer. This slow introduction of the technology for iron production did not hamper Assyrian military success. Much of what we know of technological improvements pertains to the

military — the development of more advanced chariotry, particularly the development of a platform that could support three (and sometimes four) men: the driver, the bowman and the shield bearer; and highly specialized siege warfare, including the development of the battering ram, the construction of earthen ramps, and the use of sappers.

Something more substantial can be said on the topics of Assyrian political and religious institutions and class structure, although it must be stressed that the vast bulk of our information pertains to the upper echelons of society. We really know very little about the ordinary members of society.

Assyria seems to have formed in the early 14th century when a territory at the eastern edge of the northern Mesopotamian Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni extricated itself. In wresting its independence, Assyria was born. This polity needs to be distinguished from the ancient city state of Aššur (Ashur), although there is clear continuity with it, not the least in Ashur initially being the capital, and that city's tutelary deity (also named Ashur) becoming the paramount deity of the new polity. MA and NA king lists and lists of officials present Assyria as being an unbroken continuation of the city state, and cultural continuity is evidenced in language and religion. The territory of Assyria was much larger than that controlled by the city state, however. It encompassed a triangular area from Ashur in the south, to Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad) in the north, across to Arbela in the east (see map). This was the Assyrian homeland. To this was attached a number of provinces in northern and north-eastern Mesopotamia taken from the declining Mitanni.

NA notions of kingship, and the political and religious institutions and beliefs that obtained are all indebted to the MA period. More will be said on royal ideology in a later section, but here it should be noted that the king was viewed as having an intimate relationship with the god Ashur, and he implemented the divine will. He enjoyed absolute power over the state and had responsibility for good governance, which included the care and feeling of gods and the maintenance of their shrines. He was the supreme and sole legislator and chief justice. No formal law codes existed. Most legal matters were regulated by custom and the judicial system operated without the king's personal intervention. While the king was the supreme human being in Assyrian thought, he was a mortal all the same, and Assyrians resisted the deification of their ruler which had been known in Sumer and Babylonia. Assyria was a militaristic state, and the king was the chief military leader, although he did not always lead the army in person. In marching to war the army was a sort of religious procession, lead along by priests and statues of the gods. All wars were religious wars, justified by the will of Ashur.

Our knowledge of religion is limited to the state cults. Little is known of personal piety or the religious beliefs and practices of ordinary Assyrians. Assyrian religion was

polytheistic, with the gods organized as in a hierarchy under the chief deity, Ashur. They each had assigned roles (for example, Ishtar: battle and love; Shamash: justice) and each had a primary residence in one of the main cities (Ishtar: Arbela; Ninurta: Kalhu; Ashur: Ashur), although they all had shrines in various cities. Babylonian deities such as Enlil, Marduk and Nabu were also worshipped in Assyria, and Babylonian ceremonies such as the *Akitu* ritual were borrowed. The centre of the cult was the temple and the divine statue. The temple was a monumental structure housing the cult statue in a central shrine and provided space for other deities in ancillary chapels. It also had rooms for storage and the activities of various personnel who worked there: artisans, scribes, kitchen staff, domestic servants, as well as cultic functionaries. A temple was a self-contained community with its own hierarchy of personnel and its own economic resources, which were mainly in the form of land holdings, although increasingly they were dependent on royal benefits which included donations of tribute and booty, specific taxes levied on certain provinces, and *ex voto* offerings. The head of the temple was the *āangû*, “chief administrator”, who was responsible to the king. Given that the king had ultimate responsibility for the cults, temples and their senior personnel can be viewed as part of the state bureaucracy. Divination (specifically astrology and extispicy) also fall within the bounds of religion since the Assyrian world-view understood that deities communicated with the terrestrial world, in particular with the king, through such means. There were numerous specialists in both astrology and extispicy attached to the royal court and within the state bureaucracy generally (as temple personnel; attached to the palace of a provincial governor).

In the administration of the empire (Pecirkova 1977; Pecirkova 1987) there was a clear distinction between, on the one hand, Assyria (the home provinces) and the northern Mesopotamian provinces which paid taxes of various kinds and, on the other hand, the subjugated client states from which tribute was exacted. There were some similarities in organization since the king placed each province under the control of a governor (Postgate 1980), or in client states, particularly earlier in the empire and in territories more distant from the Assyrian heartland, under a member of an indigenous ruling house as a loyal servant of Assyria. Beneath the governor and his bureaucracy were local town and village mayors. Some agricultural lands were placed at the disposal of governors, leading bureaucrats of the central administration, and members of the leading Assyrian families, often including the labour to work the land (for example, Appendix, Assyrian text no. 4).

The Assyrian state, including the administration, was essentially militaristic in organization and there was usually little distinction between military service and civil

service. The chain of command was not always from one level to that immediately adjacent; the crown gave direct orders to some officials far down the pyramid and the king had the right to intervene at any level in any matter. While the authority of the king was technically unlimited, it was checked by religion, legal precedent, and the temper of his nobles and officials; this last group effectively ran the empire on the king's (and the deity's) behalf. At the royal court there were six senior officials (the following English titles are attempts to make some sense of their position): the major-domo (*akil/rab/āa muææi ekalli*), the vice-chancellor (*ummānu*), the field-marshal (*turt nu*), the palace herald (*n gir ekalli*), the chief butler (*rab ā qe*), and the (chief) steward (*abarakku [rabû]*). The first two were royal advisers (the former alone having direct access to the king), the third headed the army, the fourth was the chief administrative officer of the realm, the fifth acted as the king's plenipotentiary, and the sixth undertook special royal commissions. We do not know much about their actual duties. Some of these officials had provinces ceded to them, which were administered by others given their absence at court (Postgate 1995; Mattila 2000). Land grants were also given to certain administrators at the next level down: viziers (*sukallu*), the chief eunuch (*rab āĒāI*), the chief justice (*sartennu*). At this level also were the provincial governors, basically organized in a hierarchy (most prestigious in the homeland or near it). Their responsibilities were military and civil. Technically they were members of the court but served in the provinces. Also outside the court, but of high standing in the administration, were the chief administrators (*āangû*) of the main temples and the mayors (*æarzannu*) of the major cities in the Assyrian heartland. There were numbers of lower level administrators ("courtiers"; *manz z p ne*) who were organized under the chief baker (*rab naæatimme*) (you will note that often the titles of senior bureaucrats reflect their origins in domestic service). There were also tax collectors for royal lands and for the provinces. Some of these were assigned specialized tasks such as the collection of horses for the army. Army officers should also be mentioned among important, but lower level, officials. Captains (*rab kiæri*) commanded a company of fifty men. Charioteers (*āa mugerre*) were viewed as the elite fighting forces within an army that also included cavalry, engineers, and infantry, the last named forming the majority of the troops.

What we know of the class structure arises out of this bureaucracy since it reflected the social order. At the top was the king, next came those attached to the royal court or the court of the crown prince, then administrators at various levels, officers in the army, ordinary Assyrian 'citizens' (there is no Assyrian term), semi-free labourers (made up of deportees who worked on state land), and at the bottom were slaves (never a very large number; some were Assyrians reduced to debt bondage, others prisoners of war).

Assyrians belonged to family groups or clans that were in turn part of larger groupings usually called tribes. One's social status, and thus access to administrative posts and the emoluments that came with them, depended on the family/clan to which one belonged. It was possible, although not common, for families to move up in social status given one or more generations of stirring service to the state by an individual. In this way one successful family member could enhance the social and economic standing of the whole family. Some foreigners were integrated into the Assyrian social system since by the late eighth century Aramean names appear at very high levels in the class structure. There were a number of other 'free' foreigners (Babylonian, Arab, Tabalaeon) who also attained high rank in the bureaucracy. Generally foreigners did forced labour on building and agricultural projects or were otherwise employed in menial capacities in temples and palaces.

The vast amount of the population were farmers who worked family-owned land. Families/clans lived together in villages near their agricultural holdings. We do not know how these villages were organized beyond each having a mayor who was their representative before state bureaucrats and who also acted as the local judge (a traditional role rather than one given by the state; many bureaucrats [palace officials, temple officials] acted in a judicial capacity with their role more like a counsellor to the parties involved than a judge who passed judgement). Babylonian villages, towns and cities were characterized by councils of 'citizens' who made determinations in certain legal cases. Whether or not something similar obtained in Assyria is not known. We might assume so, but such a body does not appear in any text. There is no popular assembly of any kind or any quasi-representative body that could make known the concerns of the people to their rulers. Perhaps the mayors played this role. There were never any popular uprisings by Assyrians against the crown or its administrative appointees. The only rebellions by Assyrians were those of the provincial governors, which reflect tensions within the elite class.

The state dominated ownership of the means of production. All large scale investment, such as the construction of monumental buildings, construction of infrastructure such as roads, expansion of agriculture into new areas, mineral exploration and exploitation, was undertaken by the crown. Most of the trade was also in government hands, although some may have been contracted to private operators. Private contractors could be used for major construction work, as is clear in the construction of the new royal city Dur Sharrukin (Parpola 1995). But in this project a levy of labour, tools, animals and raw materials was laid on provincial governors, so it was mainly construction undertaken by the state. Private investment and the wealth it generated were dwarfed by the state. It

was the largest employer of labour, including semi-free labour (deportees), controlled a large portion of the land (and thus agricultural production), controlled much of the manufacturing, and held a monopoly in the exploitation of minerals.

The economy was structured in such a way that surpluses flowed to the centre or were used for the maintenance of the state in the provinces (including provincial courts). In was the Assyrian elite who were most advantaged by this. Postgate (1979) sees three sectors of the NA economy: Palace Sector, Government Sector, Private Sector. This tripartite division has not convinced everyone (cf. Liverani below). The government sector seems to overlap both the other two rather than being completely discrete. For example, when a high government official is involved in trading activities for personal gain, one must assume that this is part of the private sector, not part of the government sector, even though it may be his government position that affords him opportunity to trade (Cole 1996: 56-68 cf. Oppenheim 1967). However, when an official trader is sent out by the crown to undertake trading activities this must be seen as part of the palace sector (Elat 1987).

Palace sector — all things owned by the royal family. Included in this sector as consumers are the royal palaces, royal family, domestic staff, administrators and military, court officials. Income was in the form of booty, tribute, ‘gifts’, produce and rents from lands owned, credit activities, slave sales, appropriations and confiscations. Expenditures were on subsistence of palace residents and staff, equipment of military staff, luxuries, gifts, regular temple offerings, building operations.

Government sector (including the army) — drew on the private sector to provide resources for civil and military operations via taxation and conscription, *ilku* and *i ākaru*. The backbone of the government sector was the provincial system. The government subordinates were responsible for the collection of payments of all kinds from their province, and for conscription and supply of soldiers and civil labourers. Village inspectors were responsible to the provincial administration for the assessment of taxation. There is no evidence of a conscious effort by the crown to control or monopolize trade, although both the crown and government officials were involved in it via agents.

Private sector — hard to document because of scarcity of sources.

Liverani (1984), in contrast, has used a two sector model of “Palace” and “Family” to examine trends in land tenure and inheritance from the mid-third through mid-first millennium. He sees two processes at work in the first millennium that I believe are apt particularly for the NA period (at least in the Assyrian homeland and northern Mesopotamia) (see also Fales 1984a, 1984b; but cf. Postgate 1989). First, the palace

sector directed to members of the palace organization (high officials at court and in the provinces) land, labour and surpluses as it decentralized control of its lands (Liverani 1984: 39-40). Some (most?) of these lands may well have been prebendary holdings accompanying the office, rather than actually 'owned' by the officials (Postgate 1989: 147). Much of the labour on these estates would have been deportees from elsewhere in the empire, some of whom were put to work in (new) royal cities. We should expect this to have increased agricultural output and thus the overall wealth of the empire, but it is impossible to obtain figures to show its actual scale. Much (All, if state land) of this wealth would have gone to the state, or have enriched the elite families to whom the king had granted the land and labour.

The second process noted by Liverani is the erosion of the connection between land lot and a family or kinship group, which had characterized earlier periods. Eventually land becomes freely alienable. The upshot of this is that

some families are completely deprived of landed property (and enslaved for debts), while other families accumulate large extensions of land which in the 'free' sector come to be the exact counterpart to the large landed properties belonging to the high officials in the Palace sector (Liverani 1984: 42).

Both processes led to landed property being concentrated in the hands of only some individuals or families, in comparison with the second millennium when landed properties were equally distributed among different family units in the family sector, and centralized by the great organization in the Palace sector (Liverani 1984: 40).

Both these models recognize that wealth came to be concentrated in the hands of the leading families who held the top administrative positions in the empire. Liverani's model points to the impoverishment of an increasing number of Assyrians who lost their family lands, but the size of this change is impossible to judge.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The following schematic outline of the history of the NA empire helps to contextualize our main concerns. This history has been divided a number of ways, depending on whether a reign has been interpreted as marking the beginning of a new epoch or as belonging with the reigns that preceded it. Some of these divisions are fairly arbitrary, so I offer here one way of organizing the period (partially indebted to Kuhrt 1995, cf. Liverani 1988a):

1. From Territorial State to Imperial Power — 934-745.
 - a) Recovery of areas dominated in the MA Period — 934-884 (Ashur-dan II, Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-ninurta II);
 - b) Extension of control to areas further west, south and east — 883-824 (Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III);
 - c) Internal problems in Assyria — 823-745 (Shamshi-Adad V — Ashur-nirari V).
2. Imperial Expansion and Consolidation — 744-c.630.
 - a) Second expansion and further provincial organization — 744-722 (Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V);
 - b) Imperial apogee — 721-c. 630 (Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal);
3. The Fall of Assyria — c. 630-609
(Ashur-etel-ilani, Sin-shar-ishkin, Ashur-uballit II)

The following are observations on each of the above epochs that might be relevant to our discussions on imperialism and exploitation:

Period 1a). What seemed to be driving expansion westwards, northwards, and eastwards from the Assyrian heartland was a desire to reclaim territories that had been gained in the MA period after the demise of the Hurrian state of Mitanni/Hanigalbat in the mid-14th century. Assyria had lost control of these territories in the mid-11th century after the death of Tiglath-pileser I. Around this time Assyria with the rest of Western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean was plunged into something of a ‘dark age’ usually connected to climatic change (Neumann and Parpola 1987) and events surrounding the movements of the Sea Peoples in Anatolia and along the Levantine coast. When written sources reappear in the early first millennium a quite different political landscape obtains in Western Asia. Whereas before 1200 there was a group of major powers (Egypt, Hatti, Assyria [replacing Mitanni], Babylonia) involved in international diplomacy and rivalry (see Liverani 1990a), no such polities now existed. The Hittite empire was defunct, Egypt had retreated within its traditional borders, and Babylonia was stable but lacked rulers with imperial aspirations. In the place of city states in Syria-Palestine, over which Egypt and Hatti had struggled for dominance in the mid- to late-second millennium, there was a series of independent kingdoms (such as Israel, Aram, Moab, Edom). A similar political geography was evidenced across northern Mesopotamia (Aramean kingdoms) and into northern Syria (Neo-Hittite and Aramean kingdoms). As at the end of the MA period, Aramean pastoral nomads were found across northern Mesopotamia, as well as there being Aramean and Chaldean semi-nomadic and sedentary tribes in Babylonia.

There were no major powers contesting control of northern Mesopotamia, which was obviously a prerequisite for Assyrian expansion. Assyria had a clear military

advantage over the smaller polities in northern Mesopotamia as it was able to muster more resources to overpower these smaller states if they were not immediately intimidated into submission. In this period Assyrian expansion stayed well within the limits of the area controlled in the MA period. If one considers the military activities in this period as the (re)taking of territory deemed to be historically Assyrian, it is interesting that there was no attempt to integrate all of this territory into Assyria immediately. The 'control' was not marked by the immediate institution of provincial administration. Rather it took the form of a series of raids, collecting tribute and confirming local rulers as Assyrian administrators/governors. A number of these local rulers were in fact the descendants of Assyrian governors who had served in the MA provincial system. The royal annals record these (usually) annual 'tours' of Assyrian controlled areas, and the itineraries in the annals give us a clear idea of the geographic extent of Assyrian power. Even though it was viewed as properly Assyrian territory, the Assyrian kings took advantage of the internal organization of these territories developed in the interim between the MA and NA periods. The formation of kingdoms in this region, as with the rest of northern Syria and Palestine in the aftermath of the demise of the great second millennium powers, was not seen as something that needed to be completely overturned, but rather as something that could be exploited. The problem was that these territories were not submissive to Assyria rather than their having the wrong form of political organization.

It is likely then that this first period should be viewed as an attempt to return to the political conditions of the MA period. From the Assyrian perspective this might not be considered a new act of imperialism but rather the re-establishment of control over territories in rebellion against their long-standing overlord. They had tried to withdraw from the natural condition of belonging to Assyria. The significance of the above is that it is possible to construe the Assyrian empire as beginning in the 14th century (MA period), then with a hiatus in the 11th century, followed by recovery in the 10th century (Postgate 1992). Thus the mechanisms of imperialism may in fact derive from an earlier period than the first millennium. That the NA kings saw themselves as standing in a tradition that reached back into the MA period is evidenced not only by the occasional reference by name to military exploits of MA kings but also by reference to the fact that 'Assyrians' lived in these territories and had been displaced by Arameans and others. The Assyrian king was seeking to return to political normalcy by re-asserting Assyrian rule and returning Assyrians to towns and lands from which they had been displaced. So one motivation for the territorial expansion in this period, as well as in the next, was the correction of perceived political anomalies. Another motivation would seem to be

economic since the annals register the tribute exacted from these traditionally subjugated areas as well as the booty taken in one-off raids into territory (notably in Babylonia) that Assyrian kings recognized could not be retained. Also, in reconstituting 'Assyria', polities abutting the territories under Assyrian control began to send gifts acknowledging Assyria's status.

Period 1b). The first half of this period (reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 883-859) saw the continued expansion westwards, northwards and southwards to the limits of Assyrian control marked out in the MA period (see map), as well as the development of the imperial administrative system. In this period the construction of garrisons on borders or at strategic points in Assyrian-controlled territory was undertaken. Unsurprisingly, borders became contested places, not the least because prior to NA annexation many of these subjugated polities had developed political and economic arrangements with their neighbours which Assyrian hegemony interfered with. Territories outside Assyria proper (say, west of the Euphrates river in central north Mesopotamia) were often initially related to in terms of treaty agreements (at least sometimes intimidated into such on the threat of Assyrian invasion), which afforded Assyria income in the form of tribute and the opportunity to intervene in their client's affairs if the partner did not meet treaty obligations. In that event, a client state (commonly termed 'vassal' in the scholarly literature) might have its ruler replaced with a more compliant member of the indigenous ruling house or may be turned into a province (one result of resistance to the Assyrian army can be seen in Appendix, Assyrian text no. 2).

In the second half of this period (reign of Shalmaneser III, 858-824) a number of north Syrian states beyond the Euphrates bend, which had marked the limit of Assyrian control, were made clients. A coalition of these states successfully challenged Assyrian influence, but only for a time. It was only through the forming of coalitions among the smaller states, as was done by northern Syrian kingdoms in period 1b) and by Syro-Palestinian kingdoms in periods 1b) and 2a), that these states had a chance of successfully resisting Assyria. Quite often these coalitions were initially successful, but they proved difficult to maintain in the longer term. Once they broke up due to internal wrangling or Assyrian meddling to win favour with some of them the Assyrians subsequently subjugated their territories. These polities were not provincialized but remained clients. A few others became clients in period 2a) by calling on Assyrian aid against former coalition partners. Period 1b) also saw the beginning of direct Assyrian involvement in Babylonian political affairs with Shalmaneser intervening militarily to

secure the Babylonian throne for the incumbent royal house against a usurper. The Babylonian king returned the favour in the next period.

The character of Assyrian control in this period continues to be debated. It is indisputable that over time members of the ruling Assyrian families were installed as provincial governors. Provincialization across northern Mesopotamia was, however, sporadic, with client states and provinces intermixed. For Liverani (1988b) the control of newly acquired territories was a web or a network with a series of control points/nodes (“islands”, “outposts”) connected by roads but with much of the territory not directly under Assyrian administrative control. From these centres the Assyrians could strike out against Aramean tribes or others who were causing problems. Thus, “the empire is not a spread of land but a network of communications over which material goods are carried” (Liverani 1988b: 86). This can be contrasted with the more common view of Assyrian expansion and administrative control as an ‘oil stain’ that slowly spread across northern Mesopotamia and which covered everything in its path. It is a question of how tightly controlled these holdings were in administrative practice.

It is in this period the lines of the NA administrative system, characterized by client states and provinces, clearly appear. The development of provincialization marked a higher level of integration. Here the Assyrians ruled directly through their own Assyrian appointees, commonly from the elite families. Why move from using the local political structures to having an Assyrian ruler? One argument is that this was a more efficient means of domination and economic exploitation. When relying on local rulers and structures there was a cost incurred by the annual ‘visits’ needed to collect/demand the tribute. Provincialization, as a system in which the tribute moved naturally, without the costs of direct coercion but certainly dependent on the threat of coercion if there was a rebellion, would arguably lower the costs of running the empire. In theory, however, the system of clientship should have delivered this ‘natural’, regular sending of tribute. Perhaps one aspect of provincialization in this period was the reinforcement of ties to the crown afforded by the appointment of members of the leading Assyrian families to governorships or other administrative positions. Also, this practice arguably extended the territory of ‘Assyria’ since these lands were now ruled by Assyrians, not by locals. Here we may observe in the royal inscriptions the beginnings of a changing notion of what constituted ‘Assyria’ and ‘Assyrians’.

Period 1c). This period is particularly interesting in reflecting on the structure and cohesion of the empire. In the late MA period central weakness led to the provinces in northern Mesopotamia establishing independent polities of their own. Period 1c) also

exhibited central weakness, marked by wrangling over the kingship and the cessation of annual military campaigns. While the western client states took advantage of this and ceased sending tribute, the status of the provinces closer to the Assyrian homeland is unclear. There is no indisputable evidence for a loss of provinces similar to the end of the MA period. When the annals start again in period 2a) Assyria does not have to reassert authority over these territories, so it may have been possible for the weak centre to hold on to these territorial gains. Perhaps the administrative structure (provincialization) was able to continue to function regardless of events in the centre so long as the governors' commitment to the centre was maintained. That is, a weak centre did not mean that the Assyrian governors declared independence, nor were the local populations in a position militarily to overthrow the governors. Perhaps, then, 'weak centre' is incorrect if the centre can still command the allegiance of the provinces despite there being turmoil among the Assyrian elite concerning who should be king.

Another interpretation of the relationship between provincial governors and the central administration in this period emphasizes the role of the former, as members of elite families, in confirming an in-coming king. The beginning of period 1c) saw a major rebellion of cities (capitals of provinces?) within the empire which Postgate (1995) suggests reflects factionalism among the provincial governors over the coming to power of Shamsi-Adad V, Shalmaneser's successor. So divided was the Assyrian elite that he needed Babylonian support to secure the throne (Brinkman 1995: 96-97; 107-111 for the treaty imposed on Shamshi-Adad by Markuk-zakir-shumi I of Babylon). The independence of some governors in this period is thought to be seen in the Aramaic treaties from Sifire between the western ruler Mati'ilu of Arpad and Bar Gay'ah of KTK (Fitzmyer 1995). Bar Gay'ah is the dominant partner, and he has been identified by some commentators with Shamash-ili, Assyrian governor of Bit Adini (Bit Adini is then identified with the otherwise unknown KTK). Shamash-ili would then be acting independently of the Assyrian crown in making a client treaty with Mati'ilu. Others counter that the texts should be interpreted as Shamash-ili acting in the interests of the central administration by binding to Assyria a client who would otherwise have become delinquent (Lemaire and Durand 1984). This would mean that the governor had not rebelled against the incumbent king. A third alternative is that Bar Gay'ah was an independent king (location of KTK unknown) who was able to poach a former Assyrian client due to the weak centre. The matter continues to be strenuously debated.

Period 2. This period is commonly identified as the NA empire proper. The frontier of Assyria continued to press westwards, northwards and southwards beyond the

limits set in period 1b), confronting other sovereign territories that had not traditionally been under Assyrian control (see map). Claims to them could not therefore be made on the basis of tradition, although it could be affirmed that at some previous time Assyrian kings had received occasional tribute or gifts of recognition from such territories (including in period 1b). Perhaps, on the western frontier at least, the borders were unstable and so in order to secure them the area beyond the periphery needed to be brought under Assyrian control (Lampirchs 1995). Thus the frontier kept moving.

Did Assyria somehow ‘blunder’ into confrontation with those territories neighbouring to the west, north (Urartu) and south-east (Elam) in period 2a) due to border conflicts and a concern to retain the allegiance of clients, or was there some overarching policy goal that Assyria was trying to attain, but which it was in fact not successful in fully realizing until period 2b)? It is widely thought that there was a specific purpose in pushing westwards beyond the Euphrates in period 2, although not in fulfilment of some long-held ‘policy’ from period 1, and that its primary motivation was economic. Assyria sought a stranglehold on all the trade routes in Western Asia. It wanted to divert to the centre the luxury goods and as much as possible of the surplus produced in subjugated territories, which were then largely devoted to the building of palaces and new royal cities (the first of which was constructed as early as period 1b). Driving westward to the Mediterranean it gained access to the Phoenician sea-ports with their exotic wares and to Lebanese cedar, while pushing north into eastern Anatolia and east into the Zagros it obtained control over mineral deposits. In the West, at least, trade had to pass through Syria-Palestine, either coming from the Aegean or further west in the Mediterranean, or coming from the south-west (Arabia). That trade was probably both state controlled and in private hands (maybe no difference since the ‘private’ operators may in fact have been government officials) and the Assyrians were thus dependent on these other states for the goods. Demands for tribute may have been a way of enforcing terms of trade (in one direction) that were economically advantageous for Assyria. Assyria obtained the goods/materials it wanted for ‘free’ (minus the costs to enforce compliance, which could be high; notice that the Assyrians had to keep going back to the West to militarily enforce these demands). This is not primarily about the control of territory, but of goods and surpluses. I would contend that at this stage the Assyrians were not thinking that they needed more land, or that they wanted to appropriate and redeploy the labour available there.

The last point is significant since it is commonly supposed that Assyria had a voracious appetite for territories and populations, not just for extracting their surpluses through ruthless military aggression. Here we need to make a distinction between those

territories east of the Euphrates bend and those to the west. Territories to the east were seemingly incorporated into Assyria. Territories to the west were not initially, and the Assyrians did not want to run these territories. That is to say, the westward push was not some sort of land grab, nor a grab for labour. Assyria would have preferred these territories to remain under their indigenous ruling houses and to send tribute and goods to the centre of the empire. This was the purpose of the system of clientship.

In this system the Assyria king intimidated the kings of the smaller western polities into submitting to his overlordship, legally binding themselves to the service of the Assyrian king through the swearing of oaths of obedience by both the local and imperial gods. Part of the act of obedience was the annual sending of tribute to the Assyrian king. Thus the Assyrians were to be guaranteed regular tribute income and access to trade goods without the costs of regular military 'trips' to extort it, unless the client broke the agreement and refused to pay. In return for submission, the local polity retained a level of self-determination and territorial integrity. The system did not work, however. The Assyrians may have felt that the coercive power of oaths sworn by the gods, coupled with the threat of military intervention if the oaths were broken, would have effectively bound the client; but it did not. This is why throughout period 2 the Assyrians moved to provincialize most of the western polities. It was not out of the desire (or a specific policy) to control these lands directly (otherwise they could have been provincialized from the outset), rather it was in response to the failure of the client system. If a kingdom repeatedly dishonoured the oaths made by refusing to pay the tribute, then the polity had to be dissolved and turned into a province ruled by an Assyrian governor. In that way the flow of income to the centre could be assured. The ideological underpinning of these actions will be explored in the following section.

The failure in the client system was in no small way due to the meddling of Assyria's powerful neighbours — Urartu, Elam, and Egypt. As early as period 1b) Urartu had sought to obtain the allegiance of Assyrian clients across northern Mesopotamia and north Syria. This continued into period 2b). Elam in period 2 persistently provided support for Chaldean rebellion in Babylonia, and Egypt similarly in period 2b) encouraged and aided rebellion among south Syrian and Palestinian clients. So provincialization, and the military action on which it depended, can be seen as responses to the influence and interference of powerful polities bordering on Assyrian controlled territories. These polities wanted to put a break on Assyrian expansion, if only to preserve their own economic interests in the respective areas. Political destabilization would also check the integration of the empire. These polities may properly have feared stable Assyrian clients as offering a staging ground for a move against their territory. Assyria

attacked them in any case, but its purpose appears to have been to stop their political meddling with Assyrian clients rather than to subjugate them and incorporate them into Assyria. Although kings in period 2b) make successful military incursions into Egypt, with Ashurbanipal reaching as far south as Thebes, Egypt was never subjugated in any real sense. Assyrian authority there was limited to some Delta kings becoming clients (Spalinger 1974a, 1974b). A long border war with Urartu was fought from period 1c), throughout period 2a) and into period 2b), until Sargon II made a successful raid into Urartian territory and as a result managed to stabilize the border (Zimansky 1985). In the case of Elam, Ashurbanipal (period 2b) successfully attacked its capital, Susa, and claims to have sacked it, but he immediately withdrew and made no attempt to retain control of the territory. Hallo (Hallo and Simpson 1998:137) is seemingly right in noting in respect of period 2b) that “Assyrian power was in fact approaching the natural limits of which it was capable, and the thrusts that were now made into more distant reigns such as Persia, central Anatolia, or Egypt were either repulsed or only temporarily successful”.

What did clients get from siding with a powerful neighbour against Assyria? Although there is no direct evidence, these large polities must have been offering terms that were deemed more beneficial to the ruling elites. In both southern Syria/Palestine and Babylonia the offer seems to have been independence, although Egypt and Elam respectively might have expected more in return for their military investment than just a check on Assyrian expansion. In northern Syria there is evidence that at least in some instances Urartu demanded by military threat that Assyrian clients transfer their allegiance to them. Clients were in an invidious position. They not only had to weigh up the putative benefits from accepting aid, breaking with Assyria, and realigning themselves with the powerful neighbour, they also had to judge the military strength and resolve of the neighbour to resist the Assyrian retaliation that was sure to come. Elam turned out to be a reliable ally to Chaldean Babylonia, whereas Egypt proved to be fundamentally useless to the south Syrian and Palestinian states. It was thus a highly dangerous political game to play off Assyria against other powerful polities. The potential gains were improved terms of clientship (since all the states in Syria-Palestine would need to be in a relationship with one major power or another), which could also include something approaching ‘independence’. The risk was political extermination through provincialization. All the clients opted for the former.

In period 2b) Assyria had basically won out over its potential rivals and stabilized the internal organization of the empire, with the exception of Babylonia which proved to be an intractable problem (on which see the next section). It is for this reason that Hallo (in Hallo and Simpson 1998) terms period 2b) *pax assyriaca*. Culturally, economically

and territorially this was the empire's zenith. Agriculture was greatly expanded and vast amounts of wealth were invested in monumental building projects in the Assyrian homeland and artistic displays in palaces as the provincial system successfully delivered taxes and labour to meet Assyrian economic objectives.

The relationship between elite families, provincial governors, clients and the king is evidenced in an interesting set of texts known as The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (Wiseman 1958). These are not client treaties in the regular sense, rather they are binding agreements for the above named groups to support the succession to the throne of Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon's son and heir (period 2b). Sargon II, Esarhaddon's grandfather, had usurped the throne, although he was a member of the royal family, and there is some suggestion the Esarhaddon was not his father's first choice for king. His father, Sennacherib, had been murdered in a palace conspiracy (Parpola 1980). Since the succession to the throne was potentially fraught with problems, at the height of the empire's power no less, Esarhaddon wanted to secure Ashurbanipal's position before his death. He used this legal instrument to obtain the commitment of the ruling elites across the empire to ensure it.

Period 3. The rapid demise of Assyria from its zenith under Ashurbanipal (668-631) to its defeat at the hands of the Medes and the Babylonians (612-605) has long confounded historians. The sources are scant and problematical. In the late 620s Babylonia again wrested independence from Assyria. It has been thought that some military or organizational weakness must have been exploited by Assyria's enemies, but what seems likely is that Assyria could not withstand a loosely coordinated two-pronged attack by two strong armies, particularly from directions in which it was less well defended (the south and east). The fact that Babylonia could become so economically and politically buoyant as to challenge militarily the Assyrian homeland highlights a serious inadequacy in the Assyrian administration of Babylonia and the failure of the Assyrians to integrate Babylonia fully into the empire. In this regard they may have fallen victim to the privileged view they held of Babylonia and its culture, not the least manifested in the privileges they granted the ancient Babylonian cities. It is noteworthy that the provincial administrative system stayed in place, inherited by the Babylonians who continued to use it successfully, as did the Achaemenid Persians later. The overall strength of this system can be seen in the ease with which political power was transferred with little fragmentation of territorial holdings. The empire did not end, therefore. Rather, its centre shifted from the upper Tigris south to Babylon, arguably continuing under the Persians with its centre shifted again further east.

CONSTRUCTING 'ASSYRIA': IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY, ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION, AND TECHNIQUES OF IMPERIAL CONTROL

One topic that has been of considerable interest to students of the NA empire is the ideology of Assyrian imperialism. The annals and other royal inscriptions, together with artistic representations on the walls of Assyrian palaces depicting victorious battles and the king's reception of subjugated peoples with their tribute, lend themselves to this analysis. A number of themes have been identified: royal ideology; the legitimacy of the king to subjugate foreign lands and to appropriate surpluses; the rule of the god Ashur (= Assyria) bringing 'order' to nations that are disordered (that is, outside Assyrian control); defining 'Assyria'; and the view of foreigners (Liverani 1979; Cifarelli 1998). These themes are interlinked and are closely aligned with modes of imperial organization and the construction of imperial identity.

Economic gain has been commonly accepted as the primary motivation for Assyrian territorial expansion. The ruling elite sought to organize territory and people for its own economic benefit, to maximize agricultural output through a more efficient use of labour on newly opened cultivatable lands, to enhance the flow of luxury goods and raw materials to the centre, and to keep the costs of running the empire as low as possible by lessening the threat of internal revolt. How was the empire administratively organized to attain these goals? Basically it was through a mixed system of direct and indirect rule. Direct rule took the form of incorporating territory into the Assyrian provincial system with an Assyrian administrator appointed as governor. Indirect rule drew on a longstanding form of international relations between politically superior and inferior rulers. This is the vassal or client system.

While it is no doubt true that an economic motive was driving imperial aspirations, it is notable that Assyrian texts, particularly the annals and court literature focusing on royal ideology, are at pains to legitimate both direct and indirect forms of Assyrian domination. As mentioned in the historical overview, a case can be made for the initial territorial expansion (periods 1a and 1b) being justified on the basis of historical precedent: these lands had been under Assyrian control in the MA period. Further, Assyrian texts expound a imperial ideology claiming that Ashur was the pre-eminent deity who ruled over all the gods, and, as a corollary, the political reality on earth should therefore be that all peoples acknowledged the sovereignty of Ashur's representative, the Assyrian king. To that end the king was charged at his coronation to "extend the borders" of Assyria. Territories beyond Assyrian control were held to be disordered, chaotic realms that did not conform to proper conduct. Charged with bringing more peoples

under the shadow of Ashur, the Assyrian king was a divine agent for order in the world. The superior military power on which Assyrian hegemony was founded was thus a reflection of the will of Ashur and the divine mandate to bring territories under his control (Appendix, Assyrian texts nos. 1, 3, 6). Assyrian expansion was construed in theological and moral terms: sanctioned by the gods, it was right and proper that neighbouring peoples submit to Assyrian sovereignty. The Assyrian empire was bringing into earthly political reality the order that obtained in the heavenly realm where the gods of all the peoples and polities of Western Asia acknowledged Ashur as their lord. Resistance to Assyrian sovereignty of course meant resistance to the divine will, which marked one as a reprobate deserving of the most stringent punishments (see Appendix, Assyrian texts no. 2, 8).

This ideology served as an important impetus for and legitimation of Assyrian imperialism. At its heart, beside the god Ashur, stood the Assyrian king. Traditionally the Assyrian king was a religious functionary; at least his title in the Old Assyrian period (early second millennium), *i āāi ' ak Aāāur* “vicar of Ashur”, marked him off as such. Another common title was *āangû Aāāur* “administrator of Ashur” (formerly translated “priest of Ashur”), which probably has cultic overtones given that the king held ultimate administrative responsibility for the cult of Ashur and other leading state deities. His role as cultic administrator may in fact be symbolic of his rule over the polity as a whole, if one accepts that Assyria was understood to be the domain of the god Ashur. Technically it was the deity who ruled over the land, with the divine will implemented by his executive, the ‘administrator’. It is not until the MA period, probably in response to the need to represent himself as an equal of the other ‘Great Kings’ among whom Western Asia was divided, that one sees the consistent use of the term ‘king’ for the Assyrian ruler. This club of ‘Great Kings’ in Western Asia during the mid-second millennium recognized their members as political equals, as well as trading partners and potential competitors, and they called each other ‘brother’ (Liverani 1990a). The basic criterion for membership was sovereignty over territories outside one’s homeland, leading to recognition of one’s status by existing members of the group. As in the case of Egypt and Hatti, this sovereignty could be expressed in the submission of neighbouring polities, lesser kings recognizing the authority of the Great King. Submission was ratified through vassal treaties and the swearing of oaths. The MA Assyrian kings joined the club of Great Kings not through treaties with vassals but by occupying and provincializing territory west and south-west of their homeland from which they had displaced Mitannian rule (Harrak 1987). These relationships of ‘brotherhood’ among political equals and vassalage

of smaller polities were the mechanisms by which international relations were played out in this period.

Assuming that recollection of the control of territories bordering the homeland by the MA Great King underpinned initial NA expansion, it is notable that by period 1b) this area included examples of both direct (provincialization) and indirect (clientship) rule. In fact, a number of independent polities that had developed west of the Assyrian homeland during the so-called 'dark age' were seemingly remnants of the MA provincial system whose governors had established independent dynasties as a result of the weak centre. For Assyria the outcome of indirect rule was much the same as direct rule, except that the client state retained vestiges of independence. On the economic level Assyrian interests were met through the payment of tribute and privileged trading arrangements. In some ways becoming a client king was similar to being a provincial governor. Governors also swore oaths of allegiance to the king, and in return the king granted them not only political power over a territory but also economic rewards and privileges (Postgate 1969; Appendix, Assyrian texts no. 4). If we consider client kings to be on a similar administrative level and to have similar administrative responsibilities vis-à-vis the Assyrian king, we could conclude that the empire was run by an administrative elite, some Assyrian, some native, who all ascribed to the Assyrian imperial ideology and who were linked to the king through a relationship of oaths, mutual obligations and responsibilities. As the Assyrian king was Ashur's vice-regent, so client kings and provincial governors served and represented the Assyrian king and maintained imperial interests. Imperial ideology acted as a mechanism for giving the empire some cohesion at the elite level. As will be seen below, it also justified the eradication of polities ruled by recalcitrant clients and their incorporation into the provincial system.

While it is possible to identify similarities in the roles of clients and governors within the provincial administrative system, there are important differences which help to focus our attention on the problem of the type of polity Assyrian imperialism was forming. Provinces had their local political institutions replaced by Assyrian governors who were commonly members of leading Assyrian families. Their appointment was an act of political largesse that served the king's political interests since the support of these families secured his position. Client states retained local rulers and political institutions. The client relationship was also a form of benefaction, but it should be construed after the model of international relations in the mid-second millennium where the 'Great King' accepted homage (marked by tribute, gifts and subservience) from lesser kings as was his due. The innovation in NA royal ideology lies in the Assyrian king no longer being *a* Great King among a group of 'brothers', but *the* Great King. It was to the Assyrian king

alone that Ashur, supreme among the gods, had given authority to rule. In the divinely instituted order of things (imperial ideology) it was appropriate for small kings to acknowledge the Great King; indeed the Assyrian king was impelled make them submit. The character of the relationship between the client and Great King arose directly out of Assyrian royal ideology which reinforced the relative status of the two parties. In response to submission the Assyrian king, as Ashur's representative, confirmed and legitimated the rule of the junior partner, committing himself to supporting that royal line against usurpers and defending the kingdom's territorial integrity against foreign encroachment. The Assyrian king acted as the protector of good order in the kingdom that had submitted itself to the (indirect) rule of Ashur. The client king recognized that his legitimacy flowed from the Assyrian king and was dependent on the maintenance of good relations with him as a faithful servant. The two kings formed a pact or political relationship with mutual obligations. It is of course an unequal relationship both politically and economically. Nevertheless, it can properly be described as a reciprocal relationship: the client gave the Assyrian king tribute, allegiance and adherence to imperial goals; the Assyrian king gave legitimacy and tenure of rule, and promises of protection.

In assuming his obligations to the client the Assyrian king exercised royal responsibilities, just as he did in the Assyrian homeland. This alerts us to the fact that the client kingdom could be considered a part of 'Assyria'. If Assyria was the domain of the god Ashur, then client kingdoms fell within this domain, but they were of a different category or status than the homeland or provinces. This difference is evident not only in the form of administrative leadership — local client kings vs Assyrian provincial governors —, it is reinforced in the language used to describe their economic relationship with the centre. Provinces (including the homeland) paid taxes into the Assyrian treasury which are described using a vocabulary quite distinct from the tribute and gifts paid to the Assyrian king by client kings. Gifts and tribute reflected an acknowledgment of Assyrian sovereignty, over against a tax that was placed on a province as part of Assyria. So 'Assyria' can be understood in a number of ways. It can refer to the homeland, and to the homeland plus provinces. But its meaning can also seemingly encompass the client states as well. When historians write of 'the Assyrian empire', these client states are always in view. It is important to consider, however, how the status of these clients within the Assyrian 'empire' makes the character of this emerging polity somewhat complex.

In order to meet his obligation to "extend the borders" of Ashur's rule, the Assyrian king drew on the model of mid-second millennium international relations in which independent polities entered, voluntarily or not, into to a submissive political

relationship with Assyria. Other territories were immediately incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system. Thus the ‘empire’ was constituted as a homeland surrounded by a network of provinces and client kingdoms of various sizes. In respect to the client states this may not be an empire, if we accept Jack Goldstone’s definition, since they are still semi-independent and have indigenous political institutions. They do, however, “have a living memory of being . . . [an] autonomous polity”. I suppose it turns on how we view the NA-type of overlord-client relationship. To the extent that territories were provincialized it may fall within Jack’s definition, although much of the territory east of the Euphrates had formerly been under Assyrian rule (MA period) and from the Assyrian perspective should never have been independent.

This mixed system of direct and indirect rule may challenge our definition of empire. (Although I note in passing that many studies of modern imperialism include both direct and indirect rule within their definition of empire.) But why were some territories immediately provincialized while others made clients? The answer is unfortunately not as simple as identifying the reaction of these polities to the claim of Assyrian hegemony: those that submitted were permitted to become clients, while those that resisted were made into provinces. The evidence from the annals and province lists shows that some polities initially unwilling to acknowledge Assyria had a compliant local ruler set on the throne who was made a client, whereas some submissive territories became provinces. Further, should we perhaps view the provincialization throughout period 1 of an increasing number of the territories formerly under Assyrian control in the MA period as an attempt to create a ‘Greater Assyria’? That is, should this be construed an act of state formation rather than as empire? And if it should be, what are the boundaries of the state? Should a distinction be made between the territories west of the Æabur river (central north Mesopotamia) and those east of it — the former being beyond the limits of the state proper, while the latter were annexed to an expanded Assyrian homeland? This consideration is made all the more challenging given the thorough provincialization of the territories between the Æabur and the Euphrates (that is, the territories west of the Æabur) into what appears to be a ‘Greater Assyria’ by the end of period 1b). The matter needs more study. To be sure, this ‘Greater Assyria’ may not have held together during the period of central weakness in period 1c), but it is the political reality that is immediately reinstated in period 2 a). In period 2a) the client system was extended to encompass all of Syria-Palestine. Throughout period 2a) and 2b) almost all these clients were provincialized in response to persistent rebellion. What then should be made of the change of status of many of the Syro-Palestinian kingdoms from client to province in period 2? If incorporation of provinces east of the Æabur (or also east of the

Euphrates?) could be considered the formation of a Greater Assyria and perhaps reflect the process of state formation, can the incorporation of the Syria-Palestine clients as provinces be viewed similarly? In discussing how administrative organization reflected and reinforced the developing understanding of imperial identity, period 2 offers clear evidence from Syria-Palestine of how subjugated polities moved from the status of 'client' to that of 'province', how the appropriation of lands and peoples was justified, how the territories and peoples were viewed, and how they were integrated into the empire. To highlight the complexity of Assyrian views on subjugated territories the discussion juxtaposes the treatment of Syro-Palestinian polities with that of Babylonia. It is to a consideration of the role of client states in period 2 that our attention is now turned.

Syria-Palestine was unambiguously outside of Assyria. Occasionally MA period kings had marched westward to the Mediterranean, collected gifts from local rulers, and erected a stele noting the accomplishment, the latter perhaps marking the nominal limits of Ashur's rule. Assyrian kings in period 1b) did likewise. Assyrian territorial ambitions in period 1b) (specifically, Shalmaneser III) may have run to the control of northern Syria, but temporary coalitions of Syro-Palestinian states successfully resisted Assyrian military encroachments. In period 2 a), by which time the territory east of the Euphrates had been provincialized, a concerted effort was made by Assyrian kings to bring Syria-Palestine under Assyrian control. Why was this? Economic gain and royal ideology again feature as the two main reasons. The economic motive is obvious enough. As a Mediterranean coastal region Syria-Palestine had a different climate and therefore produced different agricultural products. Most significant, however, was the role of the Phoenician cities as trade centres, which was promoted by the Assyrians' demand for exotic goods. Via these centres the empire could control Mediterranean commerce (Frankenstein 1979; Sherratt, Sherratt 1993). Royal ideology arguably features in the need for successive kings to "extend the borders" of Assyria. To do so would make one a 'good' king who obeyed the will of Ashur, and it is possible that the Assyrian elite expected this of their rulers. Kings would therefore need to undertake successful campaigns in order to keep the support of elites, who were also undoubtedly economically advantaged through such activities.

In period 2, Syro-Palestinian states subjugated by Assyria, a few voluntarily, the sizeable majority involuntarily, were all made clients. To be a client was to come within the economic and ideological orbit of Assyria. It was to recognize that Assyria was your overlord to whom homage was due in the form of annual tribute; it was also to recognize the legitimacy of Assyrian sovereignty in terms articulated by the Assyrians themselves:

that Ashur, the great lord, the lord of all gods (including the gods of the client territory) had commissioned the Assyrian king to superintend this land, which the deities of this land themselves affirmed. They were bound to the Assyrian king by oaths sworn by both the local and the Assyrian gods. This made the relationship one that was divinely sanctioned, although in effect it meant that the client was no longer a sovereign state. The legitimacy of the local king to rule now depended on his loyalty to the great king, which itself was construed as an act of obedience to the local gods. As the local gods served Ashur, the imperial deity, so the local king served the vice-regent of Ashur, the king of Assyria. The earthly political reality was to mirror the cosmic political reality. If the oath was broken by non-payment of tribute (= rebellion), the Assyrians were justified in undertaking drastic action against the perpetrators who had committed an offence against the gods.

The ideological reason for not immediately incorporating these territories into the provincial system was seemingly out of respect for the deities of these lands. These deities had not wronged Ashur and had arguably served him appropriately in the heavenly realm, where all things are done in good order. Thus, on the ground as it were, these polities were afforded the opportunity of serving Ashur's vice-regent, the Assyrian king (a service marked the prompt payment of annual tribute). If they did so, well and good. But if they did not, then they had offended divine order and their own gods. This in part explains the confiscation of cult statues from recalcitrant clients. If a people did not know how to honour their deity by keeping the oaths sworn by that deity, then clearly that deity needed to be taken into Assyrian care. Indeed, the Assyrian king claimed that the local deity had called on him to punish the deity's own people because of oath breaking (see also Appendix, Assyrian texts no. 7). The removal of the deity from its shrine was not a mark of disrespect rather it was interpreted as the result of that deity's will — he/she wished to go to Assyria to pay homage to Ashur. The local deity is said to have abandoned its people because of the affront of oath violation and to have permitted the Assyrian army to capture the kingdom, replace its monarchy, and take the local god back to Assyria where it would be properly cared for. (And as the deity was being removed to Assyria or elsewhere in the empire, so too that deity's people would follow it into exile.) The spoliation of the divine images of rebellious vassals and the destruction of shrines was thus viewed as just punishment for unwillingness to submit to Ashur and his king.

There has been a long-running debate over whether the Assyrians imposed on client states the obligation to worship Assyrian gods as a gesture of submission and as a means of 'Assyrianizing' them. The balance of evidence is, in my opinion, against this

imposition (Cogan 1974: 42-110; McKay 1973: 60-66; Cogan 1993; Holloway 1992; against Spieckermann 1982). Client states, as distinct from provincial territories in northern Mesopotamia, were spared direct Assyrian interference in religious affairs, even though tribute payments and loyalty oaths were required to demonstrate allegiance to the Assyrian overlord. Assyrians permitted local cults to continue even after the spoliation of divine images (Cogan 1974: 33-34). That this was the case even in provincial territories may be shown by II Kings 17:24-34 where the worship of Yahweh was officially sanctioned in the former kingdom of Israel. Peoples deported to this territory were also permitted to worship their traditional gods which they had brought with them.

The threat of destruction of shrines or the removal of deities from the shrines in their homelands was an important means by which the NA empire managed relationships with its client states. NA monarchs did not sanction the wanton destruction of the shrines and cult objects of subject peoples (Cogan 1974: 9-41, for a discussion of the character and purpose of the destruction of shrines and the spoliation of divine images in the Neo-Assyrian empire). The images of minor deities could be destroyed, while the images of the main deities of the subjugated territory, together with accompanying religious objects, were removed to Assyria. There they were commonly treated with respect and placed in a shrine in Assyria or in an outlying district. One reason for the spoliation of divine images was in order to secure loyalty oaths from vassals, after which the cult images could be returned (sometimes marked with an inscription “as a visible reminder of the overlordship of Assyria”; Cogan 1974: 36). Shrines were destroyed and divine images destroyed and/or removed in territories unwilling to submit to the Assyrian king or in rebellious vassal states, especially when there was resistance on the arrival of the army of the empire. There does not seem to have been a consistent policy, however, since not all territories appear to have divine images taken or shrines destroyed. From Tiglath-pileser III (period 2a) onwards states in Syria-Palestine suffered this fate if they proved to be consistently recalcitrant vassals (Donner 1977).

Ostensibly, while subjugated peoples were responsible for their own local and national cults, the king of Assyria had final responsibility for them. The royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (period 2b) speak not only of the normalization and regulation of Assyro-Babylonian cults and cult centres, but also include references to the repatriation of captured foreign deities (that is, deities outside the Assyro-Babylonian cultural sphere) and the re-establishment of regular offerings and income for these foreign cults (For example, Borger 1956, §11 ep. 36, 5-11; §21, 7f.; §27 ep. 3, 23-26; §27 ep. 14, 6-16; §27 ep. 17, 46b-48; §47, 22-23 [// Goetze 1963: 130, line 11]; §53 obv. 27; §65 rev. 4-5; Streck, 1916, II, Cly. B vii 93; S³, 25-32 [p. 244]; K. 3408, lines 8, 14, and

18 [transliteration and translation in Cogan, 1974: 16-17]). There is also a reference to the restoration of shrines of foreign deities. Esarhaddon claims to have proclaimed a general amnesty for all gods who had been taken to Assyria:

(I am he) who returned the pillaged gods of the countries from Assyria and Elam to their shrines, who let them stay in comfortable quarters until he completed temples (for them), and could set the gods upon diases as a lasting abode. In all cult centres, (it was) I, who established the necessary accessories (Borger 1956 §27 ep. 3, 24f.).

The result of military action to restore divine order to the territories of rebellious clients normally would be incorporation into the Assyrian provincial system, the second category of administration, with the attendant loss of autonomy. Peoples who rebelled were seen as criminals against the divine order and thus had to be severely punished (Appendix, Assyrian text no. 8). Their indigenous leaders had forfeited the right to rule the territory and for the sake of good order and the wellbeing of gods and people, the territory had to be ruled directly by an Assyrian governor and incorporated into the provincial system. Much of the local population would be deported and peoples from elsewhere in the empire relocated to the region. Religion was thus clearly used by the Assyrians as a tool of subjugation, and Assyrian gods were used to that end. The use of the client states' own deities as an ideological tool of control, as part of the imposition of Assyrian imperial ideology to recast national self-understanding, might also be seen as a form of 'Assyrianization'. The claim that the Assyrian king was the final protector of religion in both the provinces and client states undermined traditional national understandings of the relationship between deities and their polities and peoples, and brought them all within the Assyrian world-view.

As noted in the historical overview above (Period 2a), the Assyrians arguably preferred the territories west of the Euphrates to remain in client status. This form of subjugation as an administrative tactic expressed an Assyrian imperial ideology that ascribed an identity and location to these polities within the Assyrian world-view. The changing of status between client and province demanded a change in the view of territory and also in the view of the subjugated population. What had been a client state with a level of autonomy and territorial integrity was now incorporated under direct Assyrian control, as were its people. This was not only another level of administrative integration into the empire; the territory and people occupied a different place in the Assyrian world-view. It marked a different relationship between the empire and the territory/people and moved the territory into a different category. 'Client' as an ascribed

identity with certain characteristics was replaced by 'province' as a different ascribed identity with different characteristics. Clients had been accorded the right to retain national ideology and territorial integrity, and thus their 'national' identity, albeit within the context of the Assyrian 'symbolic universe'. But once incorporated into the provincial system the Assyrian claim was that the territory and people now belonged to the Assyrian empire. This then becomes the ideological justification for deportation since subjugated peoples were informed that they were now, after a fashion at least, 'Assyrians' and that they now lived in 'Assyria', so they could rightly be moved anywhere within that realm without ever leaving 'their' territory, and even take their gods with them. There was an economic spin-off from this. As new agricultural lands, including some in quite marginal areas in northern Mesopotamia (successful crops two in five years), were opened up, much of the labour on these estates would have been deportees from elsewhere in the empire (see Appendix, Assyrian texts no. 4). The populations of provinces became viewed as labour that could be best utilized on projects (usually agricultural projects, although there is evidence for building projects such as new royal cities) that served imperial needs. This concern with the efficient use of labour is sometimes couched in terms of political expediency: people have to be moved from their homeland in order to quell rebellion. However, these people are usually those deemed to be less economically productive and so are put to use in fertile agricultural areas. (For example, urbanites who have been using up the local surplus; Arameans, Chaldeans and other pastoral nomads who were not sedentary agriculturalists and who are settled to become such.) Their status was not the same as 'ethnic' Assyrians, however. The legal status of these deportees was not 'slave' but 'dependent labour', since they were tied to a particular estate. Postgate (1979) views them as 'helots', borrowing a category applied to Western Asia by Diakonoff (1974).

In turning client kingdoms into provinces peoples and deities were no longer tied to a particular place but now belonged to the empire. In breaking the traditional nexus of people, place and gods (divine rule), the Assyrian elite dissolved the basis for existing national/ethnic identity and ascribed to subjugated peoples a new identity. Deportation was a mechanism for breaking old and constructing new identities since peoples from various locations were mixed together in new settlements. Thus deportation achieved two complementary goals for the central administration: it dissolved national/ethnic identities which were potentially fragmentary to the empire (even though client status sought to bring all such polities within a single 'symbolic universe'), and it legitimated the movement of labour within Assyria to locations where it could be more economically exploited. So far as I can tell, this attitude towards and use of provincialization and

deportation was an innovation, certainly on this scale. It also might be termed ‘Assyrianization’, if by that one means turning populations from whatever they were (‘Israelites’, ‘Bīt Adinians’, etc) into ‘Assyrians’ (see Appendix, Assyrian texts nos. 3, 4, 5).

Provincialization was qualitatively different from clientship both administratively and ideologically. In considering the evidence from NA royal inscriptions pertaining to the incorporation of territories and peoples into the empire, Machinist (1993) reviews a number of key phrases such as “accounted to/with the people of Assyria/my land”, “added to the border of Assyria/my land/a particular district or province of Assyria”, “I (= the king) imposed upon them my yoke/the yoke of my rule/the yoke of Ashur, my lord”, imposed taxes on subjugated peoples “like Assyrians”, among others. He concludes that “the terms ‘Assyria’ and ‘Assyrian’, in the royal inscriptions, are not really, or at least essentially, ethnic terms, but political ones, defining a region and people that manifest the required obedience [to Ashur/the Assyrian king]” (Machinist 1993: 89). This of course need not contradict ‘Assyria’ as also referring specifically to the Assyrian homeland in contradistinction to the subjugated territories, or ‘Assyrian’ as referring specifically to the indigenous inhabitants of the homeland. In the latter case ‘Assyrian’ is arguably an ethnic designation (Smith 1986). It is perhaps notable, although unremarked by Machinist since he was concerned solely with royal inscriptions, that in NA administrative texts subjugated peoples, including those who had been deported to the Assyrian homeland, are never termed ‘Assyrians’. They are always denoted by their ethnic designation or by reference to their place of origin.

Despite the evidence of the administrative texts, the royal inscriptions make clear that the Assyrian elite viewed subjugated peoples and lands, particularly when they had been incorporated into the provincial system, as ‘Assyrians’ and ‘Assyria’ respectively. This was a direct challenge to the identity affirmed by the subjugated peoples themselves. The Syro-Palestinian kingdoms, for example, had articulated ‘national’/ethnic identities, if Israel and Judah are anything to go by, which clearly articulated a political and social identity tied to a particular place (the kingdom ruled over by the divinely appointed indigenous king) and (a) particular national god(s). Assyrian hegemony contravened that, initially by imposing client status, and more violently by turning the state into a province.

The Assyrians were not consistent in their treatment of Syro-Palestinian polities. The positive outcomes to the empire from provincialization needed to be evaluated against possible negatives. The clear example of this is the Phoenician cities Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. Their economic significance to Assyria was such that they were never brought into the provincial system but were instead permitted to retain a level of self-

determination as client states even after episodes of rebellion. Babylonia offers a starker contrast with the experience of Syro-Palestinian states. Babylonia was seen to have close cultural connections to Assyria, with major temples of deities revered by the Assyrians long established in Babylonian cities. Assyrians recognized their culture as younger than Babylonia's and to be in some sense derivative of it. Assyrians and Babylonians spoke dialects of the same language, and Assyrians had borrowed the Babylonian cuneiform writing system. Babylonia was effectively turned into a province in period 2a), regained its independence in period 2b) with Elamite support (reign of Sargon II), only to be subjugated soon after (reign of Sennacherib). Assyrian kings were so concerned to legitimate their rule there that more than one Assyrian king in period 2 assumed the throne of Babylon and ruled (perhaps in name only) the two states concurrently. Assyria never did resolve how to govern Babylonia. When Shamash-shuma-ukin, the brother of Ashurbanipal (late period 2b), was installed as king of Babylon it led to a bloody civil war between them.

Babylonia was the only subjugated territory in which the Assyrian king assumed the indigenous kingship. Other recalcitrant territories were quashed and indigenous kingship eradicated; and while it is true that the city of Babylon was razed by Sennacherib out of frustration at the population's recalcitrance, it was almost immediately rebuilt by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal who claimed to have been called by Marduk, the god of Babylon, to restore cultic normality to Babylonia. They undertook rebuilding projects in this conquered territory, and sought to have themselves portrayed as legitimate kings of Babylon rather than foreign usurpers (Frame 1992: 64-65, 67-78, 104-108, 111-113; Porter 1993). To this end they not only had royal inscriptions written proclaiming such, they also adopted the titulature of the king of Babylon as evidenced in economic and legal texts written during their reigns. There were also deportations (mainly of Arameans and Chaldeans), but the royal inscriptions make it clear that Babylonia was a special place culturally and so had to be treated in a special way. This marks a different conception of Babylonia as a territory within the orbit of Assyrian control. Nominally one might expect the king of Assyria to be the king over all the subjugated territories. While this is so, the important thing to note is that in all locations other than Babylonia, this was done either by the Assyrian king recognizing the local king as a client and thus retaining him, or by eradicating the indigenous monarchy and replacing it with the Assyrian king ruling via an appointed Assyrian governor. The Assyrian king did not have himself crowned king according to the rites of the subjugated territory. This was afforded Babylonia alone. The local traditions of legitimate kingship were not set aside as they were when other territories were made into provinces. They

were retained in Babylonia, and the Assyrian king was seemingly at pains to legitimate himself by keeping them (though not necessarily all of them; see, for example, absence from the annual *akītu* ritual at which the Babylonian king was normally required; Kuhrt 1987: 40-46). Following the tradition of Babylonian kings the *kiddin_{tu}* status of the ancient Babylonian cities with their long-standing legal rights and tax concessions for their citizens, including curtailment of the king's authority to exact taxes, fines, labour service and army service (Kuhrt 1995: 610-17) were recognized by the Assyrians.

Babylonian cities were centres of culture and the economy, so it is hardly surprising given the Assyrians' attitude to Babylonia that they displayed a generally positive disposition to them. It was also politically expedient to do so. Tribal Chaldeans and Arameans whose power base lay in regional Babylonia needed the support of urban elites and institutions (specifically, temples) to mount rebellions against Assyrian rule. Throughout period 2 they had some success in unifying urban, elite, and regional interests to resist Assyrian hegemony. The Assyrians themselves countered by acting like indigenous Babylonian monarchs. This was deliberately targeted at the urban elites and institutions, and sought to undermine Chaldean coalition building. In the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Babylonian urban elites the Chaldeans were ultimately successful.

By the end of period 2 the empire consisted largely of provinces across northern and south-eastern Mesopotamia, Syria and northern Palestine. Southern Palestinian kingdoms such as Judah were some of the few remaining clients. Babylonia vacillated between being a province, being a kingdom ruled by the Assyrian king, and being independent. The administrative status of subjugated territories reflected their particular relationship to the Assyrian king and their position within the Assyrian 'symbolic universe'. The ideology of empire was impressed on both Assyria and the subjugated polities since for the Assyrian ruling elite they were part of a single system, even though they belonged in distinct categories. Structurally the empire looked much like it did at the end of period 1b). It was a nexus of homeland, provinces and clients, but now Babylonia was included as a seemingly different type of territory. The question of what type of polity the Assyrian empire was remains. In fact the extension of the provincial system into Syria exacerbates the problem of defining 'Assyria', especially since deportation to various parts of the empire and ethnic mixing might be construed as a form of state formation. It is a problematic notion, though, given that provincialized populations and deportees did not have the same legal standing as Assyrian 'nationals'. To make matters more complex, it is unclear exactly how an Assyrian 'national' should be defined, since if it is done on the basis of birth in the homeland (or being a descendant of one born there),

the boundaries of the homeland are debateable. My suspicion is that by period 2b) it would be the territory east of the Æabur.

In this section I have emphasized (i) the ideology underpinning Assyrian imperialism; (ii) mechanisms for controlling, organizing and integrating the empire; (iii) the problem of elucidating the character of the polity being formed by Assyrian imperialism; and I have attempted to show how they are interconnected. It seems to me that the problem of integration plagued the empire. It is that problem, no doubt exacerbated by the empire's vast (for the time) territorial reach, that constantly demanded the attention of Assyrian rulers, strained their system of administrative organization, and exercised their powers of coercion. Integrating an empire may prove to be one of the areas that could be fruitfully pursued in our comparative research.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: WHAT'S 'NEW' ABOUT THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE?

In his study of ancient Near Eastern imperialism, Michael Mann devotes most of his attention the late-third millennium empire of Sargon of Akkad (Mann 1986: 130-178). This is understandable, not only because it is the earliest of the 'empires', but also because it affords Mann the opportunity to lay out his interpretative strategy for this and later empires. I am somewhat surprised, though, that he devotes comparatively little space (only some seven pages) to the much better attested NA empire. In any case, since he has treated both empires, it affords me an opportunity to relate my discussion in this paper to his work and to reflect on the relationship between the NA and earlier Western Asian empires.

In his study of the empire of Sargon of Akkad, Mann elucidates the four principal strategies in the development of genuine imperial domination: rule through clients; direct army rule; "compulsory cooperation" (indicating "that economic development and repression could go together", with economic benefits depending "on the provision of certain uniform and repressive services by the state" p. 153); and the development of a common ruling class culture (where the place of religion as "ideological power" is recognized, noting its role in the development of "ruling-class community"). Mann holds that, generally, the first two strategies dominated in the earliest empires, with the balance shifting to the latter two strategies by the time of the Roman empire. It would seem that Sargon of Akkad's empire emphasized rule through clients and direct army rule, although elements of compulsory cooperation and common ruling class culture can be detected.

By comparison, the NA empire was marked by a strategy that "combined ruling through the army and a degree of compulsory cooperation with a diffused upper-class

‘nationalism’ of their own core” (p. 231). Mann notes regarding this empire that “the ‘army option’ [was] pursued to its most ferocious known limits in our historical traditions”, marked by large conquests, the control of subjugated populations “by threat and occasional use of ruthless militarism”, and deportations (p. 234). The compulsory cooperation resulted in a number of claimed economic benefits through expenditure on the building of palaces, royal cities and other administrative centres, through investment in the provision of plows and the acquisition of draught horses, and through the storing of grain reserves. While the above two strategies have much in common with earlier empires, for Mann the NA empire introduces a new element: “a form of ‘nationalism’” (p. 235). This is not “a cohesive ideology that spreads vertically through all classes of the ‘nation’”, since Assyria was too hierarchical a society in comparison with the Greeks whose nationalism “was dependent on rough equality and a measure of political democracy”. It was only the Assyrian upper classes — nobility, landowners, merchants, officials — who together with the army conceived of themselves as belonging to the same nation. “*They* seem to have participated in a common ideology, a normative community that diffused universally among the upper classes” (p. 235, author’s emphasis). “Their community seems to have ended abruptly at the boundaries of what was called the Assyrian nation, consigning the outer provinces to a clearly subordinate status. This was probably the most novel technique of rule, adding to the cohesion of the empire’s core. Ideological power as immanent *ruling-class morale* seems to make its clearest historical entry so far in this narrative” (p. 235, author’s emphasis; cf. pp. 160-61). Thus with the emergence of ‘nationalism’ “more diffuse, universal sources of social identity grew at the expense of particularistic, local ones” (p. 236).

I agree with Mann that we see the emergence of a sense of Assyrian national identity in the NA period, although I think that it may well go somewhat deeper in Assyrian society than he allows. Be that as it may, what Mann’s analysis misses, and what I have tried to emphasize in this paper, is the use of imperial ideology to integrate subjugated peoples into the Assyrian ‘symbolic universe’. Mann is correct to note that the Assyrian ruling elite looked on subjugated peoples and territories differently than they looked on Assyria and ‘ethnic’ Assyrians, but it is significant that this ruling class ideology also articulated the ways in which various types of subjugated peoples related to and were placed within the empire. This ideology was diffused throughout the empire, at least at the level of elites.

One could therefore view clientship not simply as an example of ruling through a conquered elite (as in earlier empires), but as a means, articulated through imperial ideology, of integrating this elite within an empire-wide ruling class culture. The

conquered elite now belonged to the Assyrian ruling elite, albeit on the second tier. They were legally recognized as ruling their territory under the patronage of the Assyrian king, and they became representatives of Assyrian rule and imperial values/ideology.

Subjugated peoples and their rulers who were submissive and continued to be obedient were applauded for their moral virtues and for acting “like Assyrians”. The ideology underpinning clientship articulated a relationship between Assyria and the subjugated polity that simultaneously placed the latter in a position inferior to Assyria while drawing the ruling elite into an association with the Assyrian king and the imperial ruling structures.

Provincialization can also be viewed similarly. It did indeed reinforce the status of the territory as something considerably less than Assyria proper, as Mann avers (at least in the sense that it was a territory in need of correct ordering by an Assyrian governor); but it also integrated the territory and population closely with Assyria, spreading the notion of Assyria beyond the boundaries of the home provinces. This is seen most clearly for provinces east of the Euphrates bend, but it is arguable also for provinces in Syria–Palestine. Provincialization in particular led to the peoples and territories becoming ‘Assyrian’, even if that ‘Assyria’ can be distinguished in some sense from the homeland. This highlights the issue of the type of polity the Assyrians were forming.

Earlier empires espoused religio-political ideologies to legitimate the subjugation of neighbouring territories. But I do not think that prior to the Assyrians there was an attempt to articulate an imperial ideology that sought to integrate the subjugated polities into the ruling class world-view and then, if necessary, to change where they ‘fitted’ into that world-view (moving from client to province). Assyrian imperial ideology was diffused across the empire and should be seen as an innovative means of integrating the empire, expressing power, and maintaining control. We might want to draw a distinction between an Assyrian national/ethnic identity and an Assyrian imperial identity, although the two are obviously related. All subjugated territories and peoples find a place in the latter, whether in the administrative category of client or province. These peoples may not have had a place in ethnic/national Assyria, but the issue needs further research.

APPENDIX

ASSYRIAN TEXTS

1. Tiglath-pileser, the mighty king, king of the universe, who is without a rival, king of the four quarters (of the world), king of all princes, lord of lords, shepherd, king of kings, the exalted priest, on whom a shining sceptre was bestowed through the command of Shamash, by which he has come to rule the nations Ashur and the great gods, who have made my kingship great, and who have bestowed might and power as my gift, commanded that I should extend the boundary of their land, and they entrusted to my hand their mighty weapons, the storm of battle. Lands mountains, cities, and princes, the enemies of Ashur, I brought under my sway, and have subdued their territories. With sixty kings I . . .ly fought, and established (my) victorious might over them. I was without equal in battle, or a rival in the fight. Unto Assyria I added land, unto her peoples, people. I enlarged the frontier of my land, and all their lands I brought under my sway. (Tiglath-pileser I, MA period)

2. In strife and conflict I besieged and conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen, and cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: I cut off some of their arms and hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears and extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living and one of the dead. I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt, and consumed the city. (Ashurnasirpal II, 883-859; period 1b)

3. When Ashur, the great lord, chose me in his steadfast heart and with his holy eyes and named me for the shepherdship of Assyria, he put in my grasp a strong weapon which fells the insubordinate, he crowned me with a lofty crown, and he sternly commanded me to exercise dominion over and to subdue all the lands insubmissive to Ashur. . . . I uprooted 17,500 of his troops. I took for myself Ahunu together with his troops, gods, chariots, and horses, brought them to my city Ashur, and regarded them as people of my land. (Shalmaneser III, 858-824; period 1b)

4. Of those Arameans whom I despoiled, X thousand to the province of the *turtanu*, 10,000 to the province of the Palace-Herald, X thousand to the province of the Chief Cupbearer, X thousand to the province of Barhalzi, 5,000 to the province of Mazamua I divided and settled therein. I made them of one mouth. I considered them as inhabitants of Assyria. I placed upon them the yoke of Ashur my lord, as upon the Assyrians. The abandoned settlements in the periphery of my land, which had gone to ruin during the reign of my royal ancestors, the kings of Assyria, I restored. (Tiglath-pileser III, 744-727; period 2b)

5. The population of the four quarters, of foreign tongue and divergent speech, inhabitants of mountain and plain, all of whom the light of the gods, the lord of all,

shepherded, whom I had carried off with my powerful sceptre by the command of Ashur, my lord - I made them of one mouth and put them in its [= the new city's] midst. Assyrians (lit., sons of Assyria), versed in all the proper culture, I ordered as overseers and supervisors to give them instruction in fearing god and king. (Sargon II, 721-705; period 2b)

6. May Shamash, king of heaven and earth, elevate you to shepherdship over the four regions! May Ashur, who gave you the sceptre, lengthen your days and years! Spread your land wide at your feet! . . . Ashur is king — indeed Ashur is king! Ashurbanipal is the representative of Ashur, the creation of his hands. May the great gods make firm his reign, may they protect the life of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria! May they give him a straight sceptre to extend the land and his peoples! May his reign be renewed, and may they consolidate his royal throne for ever! (Ashurbanipal, 668-631; period 2b)

7. The goddess X, beloved of Telhunu, priestess of the land of Arabia, who, angered at Haza'el, king of Arabia, . . . handed him over to Sennacherib, my own grandfather, and caused his defeat. She [= the goddess] determined not to remain with the people of Arabia and set out for Assyria. . . .

As for Tabua, he [= Esarhaddon] enquired of the Shamash oracle: . . . Then he gave Tabua back to him [= Haza'el] together with his goddess. Eshardaddon had a star of red gold made, which was studded with precious stones, . . . and presented it for a healthy life and long days, the prosperity of his descendants, the constancy of his rule, and the overthrow of his enemies. He showed kindness towards captured gods of all lands, whose sanctuaries had been trampled, so that the gods might grant him the blessing of long life and permit his offspring to rule over humanity. (Ashurbanipal, 668-631)

8. The rest of Arabia which had fled in from of my weapons, Erra the strong overcame them. Disaster broke out among them so that they ate the flesh of their children to keep from starving. All the curses which are written in the oath in the naming of my name and those of the gods, you [= the god] decreed for them exactly as their terrible destiny: a camel-foal, a donkey-foal, a calf, a lamb might suck at seven milk-giving animals yet could still not satisfy their bellies with milk. The people in Arabia asked each other: “Why has such a disaster fallen on Arabia?” — “Because we did not abide by the great oaths of Ashur, and sinned against the kindness of Ashurbanipal, the king who pleases the heart of Enlil!” (Ashurbanipal, 668-631; period 2b)

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